

18. REPEATED VOLUNTARY CAPTIVITY BY A FEMALE MUGGER

The Gharial Research and Conservation Unit at Tikarpara (Satkosia Gorge in Mahanadi River-Orissa) has four mature Muggers (*Crocodylus palustris*) in one of the pools in addition to Gharials (*Gavialis gangeticus*). Both muggers and gharials inhabited the river with comparatively large populations in the Satkosia Gorge. Only a few of the free living muggers and Gharials were left in the gorge before their populations were supplemented by the conservation project.

On 31.1.79 an adult wild female mugger smelt its way to the male housed in the pool and broke through the wire-mesh fence at a weak point. It was named Basanti as it had traced her way guided by smell (Basana = Smell in Oriya) of the male. The very day copulation was noticed, but there was no laying of eggs that year. Though it stayed in the pool during the 1980 breeding season and there was copulation, Basanti did not lay eggs that season also. It escaped from the pool into the river on 4.8.80 the same way as it had come by breaking through the wire-mesh.

On 16.3.81 it again came into the enclosure in the same manner and stayed upto 31.8.82 when it again escaped. During the stay over two breeding seasons it layed 12 eggs in 1981 and 14 eggs in 1982. We got 17 hatchlings (5-1981, 12-1982). On 23.2.83 it again came back to its mate and layed 20 eggs and all the eggs hatched. This time it continued to remain in the pool for three breeding

seasons (1983, 1984 & 1985) and layed fertile eggs in all the three seasons. It has again escaped on 16.10.85.

Muggers generally start copulating 10 to 15 days before eggs are laid. Eggs are laid in March and April and hatchlings come out after about 50 to 60 days.

Invariably Basanti has always come to the pool in search of the male immediately before the breeding season and has tried to escape to the wild after it has successfully bred. The remarkable feature of its escape and entrance is that it has never skipped a single breeding season and has sacrificed its freedom for breeding in the enclosure. But sometimes (1979, 1981, 1983, 1984) it has not been possible for it to escape as it might not have been able to locate a weak point in the enclosure. The details of its entry and escape and the seasonwise laying of eggs would corroborate these observations.

First Entrance 31.1.79 First escape 4.8.80
 Second Entrance 16.3.81 Second escape 31.8.82
 Third Entrance 23.2.83 Third escape 16.10.85.

Season	Eggs laid	Date of hatching	No. of hatchlings
1981	12	—	5
1982	14	15.5.82	12
1983	20	11.5.83	20
1984	18	19.5.84	15
1985	15	9.5.85	12

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